

CLUTCHMATES

A one round AD&D 2nd Edition DarkSun adventure for six players

by Tom Prusa and Tim Beach

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This is a standard RPGA Network tournament. A four-hour time block has been set aside for this event.

Begin by passing out the PCs; pass them out based on class only, not revealing sex or race. Instruct the players to leave the character sheets face down until you have read the introduction. Then, tell them to study their character sheets, select spells, and notify you when they are ready to begin the adventure.

It is a good idea to ask each player to put a name tag in front of him or her. The tag should have the player's name at the bottom, and the character's name at the top. This makes it easier for the players to keep track of who is playing which character.

The actual playing time will be about three hours. Make sure you use the last 20 to 30 minutes of the time block to have the players capsulize their characters and vote.

The standard RPGA Network voting procedures will be used.

Make sure you have finished your voting sheet before you collect the players' voting sheets. This way you will not be influenced by their comments.

The players are free to use the game rules to learn about the equipment and weapons their characters are carrying.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

This is a one round adventure set on the Dark Sun world of Athas. The PCs are all members of a single thri-kreen clutch, the Kiklektet sect. They are fiercely loyal to the clutch, and to one another. Two of the clutch members are not thri-kreen, but this doesn't matter to any of them.

Recently tragedy struck the pack. Their noble and beloved leader, Ka'cha, was slain by a megapede. Ka'cha managed to kill the beast, saving Ka'tho. The megapede, in its death throws, whipped out and slammed Ka'cha into a boulder. This killed him instantly, with a broken neck. It is the senselessness of his death, after the battle was won, that had caused the pack to vow to restore him to life. They know of only one hope, their mentor and founder of the clutch. Klik'chaka'da, a tohr-kreen (mantis noble), is a powerful cleric/psionicist. Klik could certainly do something about this tragedy.

The PCs are faced with the job of transporting Ka'cha's body north to the Lost Oasis. There they must locate Durwadala, a thri-kreen druid. Durwadala is supposed to be able to contact Klik, at least that's what Klik told them when they left to go out on their own.

The PCs are a bit different than regular thri-kreen. Klik's tutorage has left them with little desire to eat elves or other intelligent creatures. Instead of being fascinated with the hunt, they all have interests in art, knowledge, and other intellectual pursuits. In fact, the one most fascinated with the hunt is the half-giant ranger, who is convinced she is a thri-kreen.

The party has two weeks to get there, and over 500 miles to travel. At the normal movement rate of a thri-kreen, they could cover only 420 in such time, so the trip is going to be tough, especially on the human and the half-giant.

Along the way, the party encounters some escaped gladiators, pursuing templars, and a hostile group of thri-kreen raiders. They must negotiate with a water merchant, or the human and half-giant may die. They must deal with the problem of fatigue as they race north. When they reach the estuaries (or before), they realize that they have no method for contacting the druid. Such a method was given to Ka'cha. Lakta'cho possesses a scroll with a speak with dead spell, she may speak with Ka'cha, and learn the method for locating Durwadala.

The PCs must get Durwadala's attention. Ka'cha was supposed to do it psionically, but Ka'tho has not developed telepathic powers yet. The PCs must figure out a method of attracting the druid's attention. When they do so, Durwadala sends them a message.

Durwadala reveals that she can only aid the PCs with some clues, for Klik always assumed that Ka'cha would be with the PCs. She sends them to a patch of esperweed, which will boost Ka'tho's powers enough to contact Klik. Durwadala possesses a stone with Klik's psionic imprint on it, it can be used to get Klik's pattern when a being attempts to contact him. Durwadala could locate Klik by magical means of her own, but she is not about to give the PCs anything for free. The patch of esperweed is located in the center of a patch of spider cactus, the party is charged with getting the esperweed without destroying the entire patch of cactus. In the midst of this difficult activity, the party is also attacked by megapedes. After this battle they can use the esperweed, and contact Klik. At first, he refuses. Only an impassioned plea gets him to change his mind, and cast the Resurrection spell on Ka'cha. This causes Klik to age severely, and he passes from this world. (dies)

For background information, Ka'cha was a 8th/8th level priest of air/psionicist, with powers from the disciplines of telepathy, psychometabolism, and clairvoyance. Klik is a

12th level psionicist/16th level priest of fire, and is over 60 years old, a very old bug. Durwadala is a 12th level thri-kreen druid, capable of shapechanging into a megapede or even an earth drake to safeguard her lands.

Notes on Athas: Athas is hot! The temperature starts out at around 100 degrees in the morning, rising to almost 150 by mid afternoon. At night the temperature may sink to near-freezing, even as low as zero in the mountains. The world has five terrain types, stony barrens, sandy wastes, scrub plains, salt flats, and rocky badlands. And yes, with the exception of scrub plains these are all another way of saying desert. Water is of primary importance, and since it only rains once a year (at the most), all cities are built near natural springs. Also very rare on Athas is metal. The standard medium of exchange is either bartering, or the Ceramic Piece. A ceramic piece, or cp, is worth one one-hundredth of a gold piece. The PCs also have only one metal weapon between them, and no metal armor. This is just as well, in the heat of the day, a person wearing metal armor has a life expectancy measured in minutes, and this is just walking. In combat, constitution loss starts almost immediately.

The rate of exchange is 100 ceramic = 10 silver = 1 gold. Electrum is used, but is very rare. One electrum is worth 5 silver. Note that few people have much money. The price scale in the DMG should be used, but in ceramic pieces instead of gold. The exception is anything made of metal, which costs the listed amount in gold pieces. Ceramic pieces are further broken into ten bits. This scale means that a single gold piece could pay a caravan guard for two years, and the entire crop of a large plantation may be traded for one metal bastard sword.

The other feature of Athas is the fierce competition for life. Even the plants are well equipped to defend themselves. They may even make a meal of the PCs if they are not careful. There are no outer planar deities worshiped on Athas, all priests and druids receive their spells from elemental deities, either spirits located on Athas, or in the elemental planes. The templars are granted their spells by the sorcerer kings, powerful defilers (at least 20th level) who are also powerful psionicists.

Magic is also different on the world of the Dark Sun. The mages are divided into two groups, defilers and preservers. Magic is powered by the life force of the world around it. Preservers have learned the more difficult method of casting spells, such that their magic is in balance with the land. Defilers merely rip the life force from the land to power their spells. Such actions leave the area around them dead and blackened, and unable to support any growth for at least a year.

This has a tendency to make everyone suspicious of any mage, and the ignorant peasant or elf-nomad is likely to slay a mage as soon as he is revealed. This makes mages more than a trifle paranoid, with good reason. You should make a point of mentioning to the PCs that they all know there are two types of mages, and explain the difference.

Since metal is so rare, most weapons are constructed of other materials, wood, bone, and obsidian are the most common. Wood has a -3 to hit and a -2 to damage, obsidian is -2 to hit, -1 to damage, and bone is -1 to hit and damage. Whenever a non-metal weapon does maximum damage on the die roll, a D20 must be rolled. On a roll of a 1, the weapon shatters.

Several proficiencies should be explained. Water Find allows the PC to find just enough water to exist for one day. This proficiency takes one hour per use, may only be attempted once per day, and the water found may not be shared with anyone else. If a being does not get enough water, they begin to lose constitution points. The loss is 1d4 points if 1/2 of the necessary water is available, 1d6 if less than 1/2 of the required water is available. These points can be recovered at the rate of 1d8 per day as long as the full amount of water is found. Water Find does not supply enough water to recover constitution points, although successful use does prevent the loss of more. A successful use of Water Find does allow recovery, if the PC also has 1/2 of the necessary water to drink after using the Water Find. If the constitution loss lowers the hit points, such points must be healed normally, they are not recovered when the constitution points are.

PLAYERS INTRODUCTION

The old woman settled back as the children looked up excitedly. She had told this story every spring for years, and every spring another bunch of kids would show up to hear it, or maybe, hear it again. She loved the children, they were so bright-eyed and eager. Looks of awe were in all of their faces, they had never seen anyone so old. The woman chuckled, to a child, anyone older than he is ancient.

"Kids today, they don't truly understand friendship and loyalty. The story I have to tell is about true friendship. Nowhere can anyone find the loyalty shown to one another like you can in a thri-kreen for his clutchmates. This is the story about the Great Run for Ka'cha, when his clutchmates all went through great danger to save their leader. It was just a small pack, there were only six of them, and two of them weren't even thri-kreen, a human and a half-giant. When the story starts, they had just gotten through

killing a megapede, a fairly nasty beast. They stood around the body of the beast, looking at their dead pack leader Ka'cha."

The old woman paused to take a small sip of water, and looked around at the children. Not a one of them was moving. All of them were fascinated by the story to come, their bright eyes shining and the expressions on their faces eager for the story to come. The old woman put down her waterjug, and resumed her story.

Now allow the PCs to read their characters, prepare spell lists, and look up magical items. When they are ready, continue with the rest of the introduction.

Yesterday was the worst day of your lives. Ka'cha is dead, slain in a senseless accident after defeating a horrid monster. It will not remain so. You six, the remaining members of the Kiklektet sect, have vowed to seek out your mentor, Klik'chaka'da. Klik was a powerful priest of fire, he could do something about it if anyone could.

When you left him to go out on your own, he said he intended to spend some time with Durwadala, the thri-kreen druid who guards the lands around the Lost Oasis. The trip is long, over 500 miles in all, including 200 miles across the edge of the Endless Sand Dunes. You must reach it in less than two weeks, or Klik may not be able to do anything about this tragedy.

You have consulted with your pack elders, and while they felt it was a dangerous trip, they did not try to stop you. In fact, Tk'r'da, the old tribal priest of water, even helped you.

He brought out a magical ring, and before you knew it, he had cast a spell on Ka'cha's body. The spell has encased Ka'cha's body in a purple gem-like material. He says that this spell will keep Ka'cha's body from decaying in the heat. In order to release his body from this gem, one of your priests must cast a Dispel Magic on the substance. He warns that the spell may not last much more than two weeks.

The pack has also supplied you with a litter, on which the container with Ka'cha has been placed. This way, any one of you can pull the litter, at only a slightly reduced speed. All of the thri-kreen are given an extra quart of water, Drasna has two quarts, and T-k has 8. With hope in your hearts, you prepare to set off on the quest the pack is already calling the Great Run.

This is a good time to ask Lakta'cho for a marching order, and watch list. Find out who is pulling the litter, and on what schedule. Also find out what times of the day the PCs are running. The optimum times are the two hours before and after dawn and dusk. This keeps the PCs in the shade, and requires only 1/2 the water normally

needed. It also means that they won't get there in time, for they cover no more than 3 miles per hour of running, as long as someone is pulling the litter. Simple arithmetic shows that they must cover almost 35 miles per day, a grueling pace. At least it is a grueling pace across sand dunes and rocky badlands, in temperatures that seldom drop below 95, and sometimes reach 135 or 140.

The PCs may run for ten hours per day with no penalties. This does not apply to Drasna, who must make two endurance rolls to keep running that long. Any longer than that, and all PCs (except T-k), must make an endurance check, or be forced to stop. T-k begins making endurance checks after 12 hours. If someone pulls the litter all day, their endurance checks are at a -2 penalty to endurance. A half-days pulling means a -1 penalty to the skill, if at least three of the pack take turns, no one has a penalty.

Keep track of how long the PCs run each day. For each hour over ten that they run (12 for T-k), they have a -1 (per extra hour run) on their endurance skill for the next day only. That is, if they run fifteen hours on day one, and twelve hours on day two, they have a -5 to their endurance for the two checks needed on day two. If they only run ten hours on day three, their checks are normal on day four. Thus, the PCs are best off running for as long as possible one day (until someone fails their check), and then running only ten hours the next day. They can also get up early, run for five or six hours, and then rest during the worst heat of the day. They can resume running until about an hour after dark. The PCs still need to make endurance checks to run more than ten hours, but if they rest, they have a +2 to their endurance skill for the necessary checks. They can move at night, but speed is only 1/2, that is 1 1/2 miles per hour.

Water Find can be done after the movement for the day has stopped. A person who fails their endurance check can not do anything but sleep (or rest) for that night. They also need their full allotment of water, or they suffer double constitution loss (2d4 or 2d6) until they do get enough water.

Food is also important, but any one clutchmate can supply the party with enough food for the day with two successful hunting checks.

Water should be a problem. No one has more than 3 or 4 days worth of water. Water Find can stretch this out, but the odds say that the PCs will run out of water. Remember that each Thri-Kreen needs 1/7th of a gallon of water per day, they can't drink a full gallon and be good for a week.

The water is not the key issue, since the PCs know that they are going to the Lost Oasis, where there is plenty of water. The issue is

making it there in time, and alive. The PCs have a chance to pick up some more water from the thri-kreen raiders, and may negotiate for some from the dwarven traders. They may be able to get some from the templars, if that encounter degenerates into a battle, but they may lose some to the escaped gladiators. If all things go bad, do not let anyone die from water loss. Should any PC be down to less than a 7 constitution, allow them to find a small spring. It should be just a wet spot in the ground, they have to dig, and each only gets enough for a full allotment of water for two days, allowing them to all recover 2d8 constitution points. (Klik only gets 4 gallons, this is enough for two days with successful use of her repel heat psionic power.) Then go back to drying them out again.

ENCOUNTER ONE: Into the Lands of the K'ro-tek.

Let the party travel for about 100 miles. When they have reached that point, they have crossed out of Chtik-tek lands, and into K'ro-tek lands. The K'ro-tek are sworn enemies of the Chtik-tek, and the Chtik-tek look down on them as bandits and thieves.

You have left the safe homelands of the Yellow Hills, and have crossed into the T'kara Badlands. This is not a place to let your guard down, for the K'ro-tek live here, as degenerate a band of thieves and murderers as ever roamed Athas. It makes you sad to think that they are the same race as you. You have just entered their lands, it'll take you the better part of two days to cross it. Of course like the Chtik-tek, the Kro-tek roam a wide area. The odds of meeting them are very slim. By the middle of the day, you realize that the odds have failed you. Coming from the east you can clearly see a group of thri-kreen, it looks like there are about 20, approaching your position-fast.

Pause and let the PCs react. They have five minutes before the K'ro-tek catch them, they can do what they will to prepare. They cannot outrun the K'ro-tek without abandoning Ka'cha. They are in for a fierce battle, for the K'ro-tek have a particular hatred for Ka'cha, he thwarted them several times. Unless the PCs immediately attack, the K'ro-tek surround them and stop to talk, or rather, taunt.

K'ro-tek (thri-kreen) NA (20): AC 3, Mv 36, HD 4 (F4), HP 22 ea, #Att 5 or 2, THAC0 17, Damage 1d4x4/1d4+1, or 1d10/1d4+1, Dex 17, SA poison (only works on T-k and Drasna), Leaping 20' up or 50' straight ahead. They are carrying a stone gythka and a one quart water

bottle each. 13 of the bottles are empty, the other seven are full. They all have the wild psionic talent of increased strength, which they use during the negotiations. This increases their strength to 18, giving them a +1 to hit and a +2 to damage. They each have four chatkchas, doing 1d6+2, with a THAC0 of 15.

K-ri'do & K-ra'di (subchiefs), AC 2, Mv 36, HD 6 (F6), HP 44, 53, #Att 5 or 2, THAC0 14 (13 with chatkcha), Damage 1d4x4/1d4+1, or 1d10/1d4+1, Dex 17, SA poison (only works on T-k and Drasna), Strength of 17 and Dexterity of 18. They are fiercely loyal to K'lin-r, he is their clutch leader. They have the psionic talents of All Around Vision and Feel Light. K'ri-do uses his All Around Vision to keep the PCs from springing a surprise on him, he cannot be surprised while this power works. His power score is 15. Both subchiefs carry a full one quart waterskin.

K'lin-r (K'ro-tek leader): AC 0, Mv 36, HD 9 (F9), HP 75, #Att 5 or 2, THAC0 9, Damage 1d4x4/1d4+1 (add +7 to first attack due to 19 strength), or 1d10+8, carrying a +1 gythka and a 2 quart water bottle, it's full. He has a strength of 19 and a dexterity of 21. He has 10 chatkchas, doing 1d6+2 with a THAC0 of 8. K'lin-r has the wild talent of Biofeedback. His power score is 14, and he uses it during the challenge. It raises his AC to -1, and lowers any damage he takes by 2 points (minimum of 0).

K'lin-r is an oily type of bug, seemingly friendly, but his comments are veiled insults. He is going to get around to attacking the PCs, but he wants to play it out for fun.

"So, the Chtik-tek have decided to pay their betters a visit. And what is that they're dragging? It looks like Ka'cha. I must say that he looks much better under glass than he ever did in life. Who was the fortunate soul that put him there? I'd like to thank him."

"You know that a price must be paid for passage through our lands. We would probably accept all your water and weapons, provided you throw in that dead bug."

"Imagine, a half-giant with thri-kreen. Have the Chtik-tek fallen so low that they have to start taking in half-breeds now? Perhaps it is time for the K'ro-tek to expand their territory."

"Look at the little human. I don't know which is funnier, the ugliness of that whelp, or the odd color of that pseudo-bug over there. Is he a real thri-kreen, or some sort of kank?"

The PCs may be ready to attack, but remind them of the odds. If they persist, start the battle. Both Drasna and K'ari know of the rules of the

challenge, however. If one of them proposes it, K'lin-r accedes. He wants to set the terms. His terms are, three of the PCs must fight, and unless all three win, the K'ro-tek take everything that the PCs own. If the PCs win, they may cross K'ro-tek lands unhindered. This is for real, even the K'ro-tek won't violate the rite of challenge. Let the PCs decide who is going to fight. K'lin-r and his subchiefs prepare. Magic and psionics are strictly forbidden, but K'lin-r doesn't care. Also, when thri-kreen fight, only natural weapons are used. He is firm about this, neither Drasna or T-k are allowed to use any weapons. T-k does 1d2 +9 with her fists, and gets two attacks per round. Drasna does 1d2 + 7, also getting two attacks. They really don't need weapons. If the PCs are complaining about this, remind them of the damage they actually do with their fists, this should quiet the complaints.

The battle is to the death, the PCs must win all three. This shouldn't be a problem, except in the case of K'lin-r. Let the PCs pair off with the opponents as they see fit, but be sure to have one of the K'ro-tek attack a different opponent fairly early in the combat. That way the PCs get the idea that this is a group contest, they can help the others if necessary.

When the last K'ro-tek combatant falls, the rest move on, with much grumbling and cursing. Unless stopped, they strip the bodies of their fallen leaders. They won't challenge the PCs if they are stopped from doing this, but they do glare at them, and grumble even louder. The bandits won't break the challenge, but they follow the PCs until they leave K'ro-tek territory.

ENCOUNTER TWO: Escaped elves!

The PCs can continue for another day. Let them make water find rolls, and camp for the night. Use the trailing K'ro-tek to make them nervous. The K'ro-tek won't get closer than a few hundred yards, but the PCs know they're out there. Actually they are just watching the PCs, to make sure that they leave K'ro-tek lands. During the early morning hours, the PCs on watch should be told to make a surprise roll. They hear the K'ro-tek pack moving. The sound of movement gets closer, but not close enough for anyone to see them. From the sound, the K'ro-tek do not get any closer, they are circling the camp. When they get in front of it, they move away, and after a few minutes, no more can be heard. After this occurs, the PCs have an uneventful night.

If the PCs go after the K'ro-tek, the bandits keep their distance, the PCs cannot catch them without splitting up or abandoning Ka'cha. Neither is a good option. If the PCs insist on

splitting up, they spend an hour chasing the K'ro-tek before they lose them, costing them time and gaining them nothing. If they leave Ka'cha, they return just in time to run off a few of the K'ro-tek who had snuck around and attempted to steal the gem.

In the morning, the PCs can investigate the area if they wish. They can easily find the tracks of the K'ro-tek, a successful tracking roll by one of the rangers reveals that one K'ro-tek went north and returned, then the entire pack went north. No more information can be obtained, but you can inform the PCs that the feeling of being watched is now gone. If they persist in wasting time here, remind them that time is passing. They still have a long way to go. When they continue, they can run for almost two hours, then they come across a battlefield.

You have been running for a few hours, it's another hot day. According to K'ari, there is an oasis about 45 miles northeast, you'll have to head for that. As you run, you notice circling carrion birds. Something large has died up ahead. You are prepared to circle the area, but as you come over a small hill, you can see that it is not one large beast, but many normal ones. In fact, it looks like the entire pack of K'ro-tek. Someone, or something, has done you a favor. You see one body that is not a thri-kreen, from here it looks like a human, but you can't tell for sure. As you watch, a carrion bird settles down on the body of the human and pecks at him. You don't see any movement, but the bird screeches and flies back up into the air.

The PCs may go check out the battlefield, or they may go around. If they check the battlefield, they find a badly wounded elf, if they go around, they stumble on her companions.

The battlefield:

As you approach you can see that the K'ro-tek seem to have been cut apart by a whirlwind. They are scattered all over, dead to the last bug. In addition to the figure you saw earlier, an elven female, there is another body, that of a mul, buried under two dead K'ro-tek. The elf is very badly wounded, but she is still alive. She is not conscious. Both she and the mul are wearing scanty clothes, she has only a loincloth, a shirt, and some leather armguards on. The mul has just his loincloth and a club. A crudely made stone hammer lies near the elf.

Note: If the PCs got involved in a big battle last encounter, and defeated the K'ro-tek, change the description a bit. Instead of the original K'ro-tek, it is another band of Thri-Kreen. They have identical equipment and stats

as the first group. This may hint that they were also K'ro-tek, that and the fact that this is K'ro-tek land.

Let the PCs decide what to do. They may heal the elf or not, as they choose. A cure light wounds stabilizes the elf. She regains consciousness in one turn. Before she does, the elf's companions notice the PCs. Her companions, an elf and a mul, both male, are sleeping in a nearby cave.

Someone who inspects the battlefield can easily notice streaks of blood across the rocks. The streaks lead to a small cave in a nearby rocky outcropping.

Elf female (Petri Hardfist), AC 6, Mv 30+, AL N, HD 7 (Gladiator 7), HP 70 (currently has 1), #ATT 2, THAC0 14, Damage 1d4+2 (Strength & specialization), Str 17, Dex 17, Con 18, carrying a stone warhammer, wearing leather armguards. Psionic Talent: Compact. (New power from the Dragon Kings hardbound. This allows her to shrink unliving objects by a factor of ten for 24 hours. Her power score is 12).

Gural was Petri's companion, he was a mul gladiator as well, but he is clearly dead. The companions:

The PCs may decide to bypass the battlefield. If they do, as they start to leave, they awaken the elf's companions, who come out of the small cave to confront the PCs. They are both badly wounded from the battle, they crawled to a cave to get out of the sun, and both passed out. They awaken when the PCs pass their cave, or when they hear sounds of movement from the battlefield. Both of these gladiators assume that Petri and Gural are dead.

Elf male (Maxim Hardfist), AC 7, Mv 30+, AL N, HD 8 (Gladiator 8), HP 77 (currently has 3), #ATT 2, THAC0 10, Damage 1d6+8 (Strength & specialization), Str 19, Dex 16, Con 17, carrying a bone shortsword, wearing leather leggings. Psionic talent: control fire, not applicable here.

Mul gladiator (Farcin Bleeder), AC 10, Mv 24, AL N, HD 9 (gladiator 9), HP 109 (currently has 7), #Att 3, THAC0 10, Damage 1d6+3x2/1d4+1, Str 17, Dex 12, Con 19. He has a metal short sword and a bone dagger. Psionic talent: Increase strength, he uses it to increase his strength to 18, power score is 11.

Maxim and Farcin challenge the PCs. They may be hurt, but they are not quitters.

Suddenly a voice rings out. From the cave in the rocky outcropping emerge an elf and a mul. They limp toward you, holding weapons at ready. "Leave our dead companions alone. Petri was my

mate, not fodder for the likes of you." Before you stands a badly wounded elf. You can see that both he and his companion, like the two on the battlefield, paid a terrible price for their victory over the K'ro-tek. Bites and scratches cover both of their bodies, it is a wonder that they are still walking. The elf steps forward and cries "I demand the rite of challenge. I will fight any one of you, to the death if necessary, to protect my friend, and the body of my mate." You realize that there would be no honor involved in such a challenge, the elf would go down in the first round of combat.

The rest of the encounter is determined by the PCs reactions. They can handle the challenge in several ways. Mentioning that Petri is not dead is enough to have the challenge forgotten, at least for the present. Maxim wants to tend to Petri, but Farcin continues to glower at the PCs. Farcin cannot speak, his tongue was cut out when he insulted his master. He glares and glowers very well, however.

If the PCs accept the challenge, the PC who accepts wins initiative in the first round, and knocks Maxim out with the first blow. Farcin moves to stand over the body, and glares at the PCs until Maxim wakes up again.

If the PCs agree to talk to Maxim, but haven't inspected the battlefield, he wanders to his dead mate, only to discover she is still alive. He asks if any of the PCs are capable of healing, he will gladly submit to being eaten if they will only allow his mate to survive.

Maxim is a belligerent type, and he is sure he is going to be eaten. That's who the K'ro-tek intended to do, thri-kreen are all alike to him. He makes comments to Drasna and T-k about the company they associate with. No matter what the PCs say, he does not believe them. He knows that they'll eventually get hungry enough to eat him.

When Petri wakes up, she is a bit friendlier. The presence of the human and half-giant lends credence to their claims, although she also starts out believing they are members of the K'ro-tek.

The gladiators don't know much, they escaped from Urd, just as T-k did. They escaped two weeks ago, and are heading for a slave village to the north They intend to live in a free village. They are short on water, they have only one gallon left. If the PCs search the bodies of the K'ro-tek, they find only another gallon, which the gladiators claim by right of conquest. The PCs may claim any of the weapons or other gear from the K'ro-tek, it is listed with their stats in encounter one. The gladiators are also interested in the reason for the litter with the giant gem on it.

The gladiators need both healing, and water. They are willing to trade, outside of the metal short sword, they have little of value. Since no one in the party really needs a metal short sword, Petri eventually comes up with a proposition. She can psionically shrink unliving objects to 1/10th of their original size. This lasts for a day. If the PCs can aid them, she can shrink the litter, the gem, and Ka'cha, allowing the PCs to make much better time for the next 24 hours. If Ka'tho asks, she has heard of such a power, it is a minor psychokinetic power. Petri is glad to demonstrate for the PCs, using the body of one of the K'ro-tek. She also warns them not to have it in a container when it expands, for it will destroy anything or anyone who attempts to stop it from regaining its size.

The gladiators are proud, but desperate. They have no skill at water find, and as wounded as they are, they're not going to last much longer. If the PCs heal all three of them, even with just a Cure Light Wounds apiece, and come up with any water at all, they perform as agreed. Even a single Cure Light (for Petri), and the location of the oasis are enough.

Carrying the smaller gem, the PCs can run at a rate of 36 for 10 hours, with no penalties. This does not apply to Drasna, who must make an endurance roll every hour after the sixth, for she is pushing herself past a comfortable speed. She cannot carry the gem, it weighs about 45 pounds, this slows her down to her normal running speed. To keep things simpler, just assume that the PCs can move at 4 miles an hour for the next day's travel.

If the PCs decide to have the gladiators accompany them to the oasis, inform them that in their condition the fastest they could move is about 20, only 2 miles an hour. If healed and given water, the elves could match the PCs speed, but the mul never could.

The PCs have been running for two hours. Depending on when they started, they may be able to run for another 12 or more during the day, plus two more the next morning. This is a serious chance to make up time, they may even reach the oasis this very day. When they do, they find that it is unoccupied, and the water is dirty, but drinkable. They can camp there overnight with no trouble, and refill their water skins. As they are preparing to leave the oasis, they notice a group of beings on kanks (riding size insects), approaching the oasis. This occurs before the gem expands. When you reach this point, continue with the next encounter.

Encounter 3: Your money or your bug.

It feels good to have enough water again. You are preparing to continue the run, having made good time so far. As you prepare to leave the oasis, you can see a group of beings approaching. There are twelve humans mounted on kanks, from the looks of it. As they get closer, you can see that there are several elves, half-elves, and even one dwarf.

Pause for player reactions. They may leave the oasis, or they may wait for the templars here. The oasis is more defensible than the open desert, there are four trees that the PCs could put their backs to, although the thri-kreen are not really built for it. Either way, the templars notice them and approach.

The riders come up to meet you, halting ten yards or so in front of you. "We are templars representing his highness, Binarak of Urd, noble king of the people. We are searching for some escaped criminals, villains against the people of Urd. These murderers were four, a mated pair of elves and two particularly ugly muls. Have you seen such vermin?"

The PCs may respond as they wish. Take the player with T-k aside and tell her that she was wanted for murder and treason also, when she escaped. She didn't even kill anyone, but that didn't stop the templars.

Guards: NA (6), AC 4, AL LE, Mv 24, HD 5, HP 40, #Att 3/2, THAC0 15, Damage 1d8+2. The guards are carrying bone longswords, with which they are specialized. They wear hide armor, and use leather shields. Each has a strength of 17 and a dexterity of 15.

Templars: NA (6), AC 1, AL LE, Mv 24, HD 7, HP 37, #Att 1, THAC0 17, Damage 1d6 (bone shortswords + str), SA Spells, SD spells. These templars have hide armor, and leather shields. Strength 16, Dexterity 17, Wisdom 16. Spells memorized: Command, Create Water, Cure Light Wounds, Cause Light Wounds, Merciful Shadows (already cast), Hold Person x2, Silence 15' Radius, Spiritual Hammer, Dispel Magic. These templars have the psionic powers of Truthhear, Telekinesis, Mind Bar, Psionic Blast, Mental Barrier, and Locate Water, respectively.

Of the psionic powers, only two of them should have any effect on this encounter. The truthhear allows the first templar (Trionis, a human) to detect a lie on a roll of a 16 or less. He can only detect it if someone knows that they are telling a falsehood. The second, Psionic Blast, is only used if combat ensues. The templar (Fipilor, an elf) must first roll a successful Contact, requiring a 16 or less. On the next round, he may blast the PC. The intended target must save vs. death magic, or lose 80% of his current hit points, but

only in his mind. The subject loses consciousness when he loses the remaining 20%. The hit points return after one hour. Contact automatically fails against a psionic defense, so if he should target Ka'tho, he'll simply switch to a different target. He would have to attack successfully four times to hurt Ka'tho, he won't take the time.

Templar Leader, Sularux: AC 0, AL LE, Mv 24, HD 8, HP 60, #Att 1, THAC0 13, Damage 1d6 +9 (metal short sword +2 + str), Str 19, Wis 18, Con 17, wearing Bracers AC 2, a Ring of Protection +2, and carrying a wand of magic missiles. (He must hit with a THAC0 of 16) Spells memorized: Command, Create Water, Cure Light Wounds, Cause Light Wounds, Merciful Shadows (already cast), Hold Person x2, Silence 15' Radius, Spiritual Hammer, Dispel Magic, Cause Disease, Negative Plane Protection, Create Food and Water, Cure Serious Wounds, Detect Lie, Tongues, Flame Strike. He has the psionic powers of thought shield and biofeedback. (-1 to AC, -2 per die of damage taken, Power Score 15).

Sularux knows the proficiency of somatic concealment (roll 16 or less), and attempts to cast Detect Lie, while have Fipilor do the talking. Trionis is also using Truthhear, but Sularux doesn't trust anybody. The PCs can tell them the truth. The escaped criminals, who are on the way to the oasis, they should be here tomorrow or the next day. They may also lie. If they do, it is probably detected. If so, Sularux becomes hostile, and the guards move to surround the PCs. They begin looking closely at T-k, remarking that a half-giant escaped from Urd a few years ago, the party wouldn't know anything about that, would they?

The PCs apparently are in big trouble. This is not the case. The templars do not really want to fight a pack of thri-kreen. For one thing, Hold Person spells don't work on them. For another, thri-kreen are famous for leaping over the guards (cannon fodder) in the front and attacking the important people in the rear. Neither of these things appeals to Sularux. All he really wants is some information or some money, not necessarily in that order. When you have let the players stew a bit, he comes out with the real proposal.

"I don't know, you look like a suspicious bunch. Perhaps we should take all of you back to Urd. If not you, then perhaps that nice gem you're carrying. I'm sure I heard of a large gem with a small bug in it being stolen just last month. If I return it, and you come to Urd, I'm sure you'll get a big reward."

Sularux is not familiar with a Sepia's Snake Sigil, he thinks it is a big low grade gem, worth a small amount of money. The way the PCs are carrying it means it is valuable to them, so by asking for it he thinks he can get a nice bribe. The PCs are going to have to give him money to get rid of him.

Sularux wants at least 1 gold piece for his trouble. Let the PCs make counter offers, if they are in character, they should be offering handfuls of coins. Have them tell you what coins they have, and how many they are offering. Generate some sort of roll to determine the actual content. When it reaches more than a gold piece, Sularux apologizes for not believing their story, and proceeds to the oasis to water his men and beasts. The PCs may leave.

Sularux actually intends to follow the PCs, and does so for the first day. He expects them to lead him to the escaped slaves. Unfortunately, his cilot (tracking beast) was lost to a monster several days ago. The templars lose the PCs on the second day, and don't find the escaped slaves, either.

If the PCs are ready to begin the fight, remind them that while they are fully confident that they would win, it would not be without cost. They are unsure what one of those Flame Column things that templars cast would do to the gem with Ka'cha in it. Also, a heavily wounded party does not travel swiftly. It is in their interest to make the templars simply go away.

If they tell the truth, Sularux still wants the bribe, or the gem. In this case, the PCs are not followed, as the templars wait for the slaves. Should this occur, the PCs are safe, but they feel a bit ignoble. If someone thinks of it, the wilderness warrior or the ranger could circle back around the oasis, and leave a clear warning marker that the elves would be sure to recognize. This would allow the slaves a fighting chance. If someone wants to go back and kill the templars, you can allow a wisdom roll by Drasna or T-k to come up with the marker solution. Given the skill that the escaped gladiators showed in the previous encounter, with a surprise attack they could beat all 13 of the templars forces.

If the PCs see the templars, and begin throwing money at them, Sularux still asks the question, and hints at the gem, to see if he can get more money from them. If they have thrown all that they have, he lets them go, as described above.

EXTRA WATER: Should the PCs ask, anyone with survival skills (that's everybody), can fashion a one quart water container. This takes about an hour, and requires a successful survival proficiency check. They may use their best

survival skill - K'ari has a bonus on one of his that makes quite a difference. Don't let them waste more than two hours this way, then spring the templars on them. The templars won't stop them if they want to continue after the templars arrive. They will, however, come over every hour or so and make comments about the gem, and ask for more money. In no case can the PC find enough material (bark and tree sap, mostly) to make more than a dozen one quart waterskins. These are one shot waterskins, meant to be used and thrown away. They will not hold up for more than a day or two of movement, and as soon as they dry out they will be useless. If the PCs don't use these up right away, after two days have the makeshift waterskins start springing leaks. Two of the skins go bad per day, any water in them is lost into the sand.

ENCOUNTER 4: How much for de bug?

The PCs should now be five or six days into their trip, and should have covered from 160 to 240 miles. They may travel for up to five more days, or until they start to run out of water. Keep track of the miles covered, and days passing. On the tenth day of the trip, announce that the grueling pace is starting to take its toll. Henceforth, Water Find can only find enough water to fill 1/2 of the character's needs. They must have enough real water for 1/2 of their needs, or lose 1d4 points of constitution per day. If the characters have been doing extremely well on Water Find rolls, let them go for two more days. By then they should be worried. If they are doing poorly, and have some people who have already lost constitution, they meet the water merchant immediately.

The trip is beginning to wear upon you all. Muscles and tendons ache, throats are parched, and your bodies are so weary. Even your minds are beginning to play tricks on you. Yesterday Ka'tho thought she heard Ka'cha speaking to her, and T-k was sure that the templars were still on your trail. Even worse, today Drasna's waterskin sprung a leak, it is empty now. Even the daily hunt for water is becoming too much to bear. You must have more water, but there is so little time left. Though it is ten miles out of the line of travel, you know of a spring reachable today. You have to follow a canyon, straight in for five miles, and look behind a large red boulder. The location is not secret, but you haven't seen anyone for four days.

The PCs may decide to bypass this, if they do, inform them that tomorrow, they are tired enough that Water Find counts as an hour of

running. In other words, they need to make a constitution check to do their Water Find, or all they can do is plop down and rest.

Note: Drasna does notice the leaky waterskin, she may drink all of the remaining water, or pour it into other containers, not including the ones they made at the oasis, which are useless now.

The Spring:

When they get to the spring, they find that there is a lush garden, fruit trees, and a crowd of dwarves, who now claim to own the spring. The dwarves won't share their water cheaply, PCs who gave all of their money to the templars are in for trouble here.

The dwarves want a silver piece per person to drink, and 2 ceramic pieces per quart for water. It goes up to 2 silver pieces for one gallon water containers. They have five such containers for sale.

The leader, Hardknock Hambone, is a talkative, cheery dwarf. He and his tribe have dug out and expanded the spring, and have begun to mine obsidian, for shipment to Tyr. His focus was to found a new dwarven town, and he feels great about the world. He is very proud of his new little village, population 47 hardy make dwarves, 24 females, and 5 children.

The dwarves can give directions to the Lost Oasis, at least the general direction. As for the negotiations about water, they can go several ways, depending on the PCs.

If they still have money left, and simply dump it all out, the dwarves see a chance for a ready profit. They answer that such a sum covers drinking, but not refilling. T-k may have to confess her knowledge of money here. It's OK, if it's done for the good of Ka'cha.

If they are short of money, then they must bargain. The dwarves are not bashful, they quickly offer to take that big gem as payment for all the water the PCs can drink, refilling of all waterskins, and they'll throw in five one gallon waterskins to boot. Naturally this won't be accepted, but a potion fruit (any type) is worth 1 silver piece in trade, and a magic weapon is worth a gold piece. If T-k protests that this is robbery, the dwarves look offended, and tell her that she can always take her business elsewhere. If anyone else protests the price, ask them exactly how they know. None of the other PCs has any idea what money is worth, someone who tries should not be allowed to get away with it.

If they have no money at all, the offer is made immediately, and the PCs must trade or get no water.

Lakta'cho has been told to give the traders some money, and then she can take what she wants. If the PCs all do this, they just might get away with it. If they are trying this, wait until someone who has been quiet, or not very involved in the role playing, turns over their money. Reply that it's not enough, and begin the bartering.

The PCs may threaten to attack if they don't get water. The dwarves know how to respond to that. The first sign of a threat causes the dwarves to scramble for cover. The PCs see several dozen crossbow wielding dwarves line up along the ledges of the cliff. There are also at least two priests of fire, recognizable from the red hot weapons they are carrying. Fighting is not a good option. If a challenge is offered, it is not accepted. Hambone is not shamed by this, he merely replies that there is no ground for a challenge, the dwarves are not threatening the PCs, they merely want fair payment for their work.

ENCOUNTER 5: The Lost Oasis

When the PCs get within 100 miles of the Oasis, they begin to suffer from severe fatigue effects. Each of the last two (or more) days, the PCs lose 1 point of constitution per day, due to weariness. This returns when they get a full 24 hours of rest, one point per day. When they get about 20 miles away, the gem around Ka'cha suddenly disappears. They must hurry, Ka'cha's body can't stand up to the heat for long. When they are in the final hour, describe the oasis to them.

Finally, you spot the beautiful green sight that can only be the Lost Oasis. It is surprisingly large, there is a forest of pinion trees, and greenery extends for several miles around the oasis. You stumble in exhausted, and find a small stream flowing within a few hundred feet of the edge of the forest. You stop and quench your thirst, and then refreshed, you look around. Now that you're here, how do you get in touch with Durwadala? A druid is never seen, if she doesn't want to be. You're fairly sure that Ka'cha would have known how, but none of the rest of you do. You must find the druid, and soon.

There is a very obvious solution here, the speak with dead spell on Lakta'cho's scroll. Unlike dead enemies, Ka'cha won't try to deceive or befuddle the PCs. Of course, the dead have a

different viewpoint, and are not very talkative. The spell is at 8th level of use, although either of the priests could have memorized it, preparing for this. Each use allows the PCs to ask three questions. Some sample responses for the most likely questions are given:

How do we contact Durwadala? Answer: Psionically.

Where is Durwadala? Answer: Watching.

How do we contact Klik? Answer: Through Durwadala.

Is there another method of contacting Durwadala? Answer: Yes.

What is this method? Answer: Get her attention.

How do we get her attention? Answer: Magic, then look all around.

What type of magic? Answer: Flashy. Don't destroy anything natural, or you join me.

Do you want to be brought back from the dead? Answer: Sure, this is boring, and I miss Ka'tho and the little clutch of Kiklektets to be.

What psionic method should be used? Answer: Synaptic static.

How do we do that? Answer: Ka'tho has the means, although not the power. The answer is red. (referring to Ka'tho's psionic ruby.)

What should be done with the ruby? Answer: It must be used badly.

Will destroying the ruby set off synaptic static? Answer: Could be.

What do you mean by red? Answer: Which of us is dead here? Think, and look at Ka'tho. Remember to look all around. (If they ask, the only red object Ka'tho has is the ruby.)

If the PCs don't think of this, there are several other options. They may come up with the answers themselves, methods of attracting a druid could be known by rangers or wilderness warriors. The fact that most of them are thri-kreen doesn't help a bit, but the unusual look of the group (they're pulling a wounded or dead thri-kreen on a litter, for goodness sake!), does guarantee that Durwadala is watching. As long as they make some kind of attempt to contact her they eventually get the message, but let them sweat for two or three hours first. Mention that it's getting close to nightfall of the 14th day,

and that it's too bad only Ka'cha knew how to contact Durwadala. It's not like they could talk to Ka'cha, or anything.

If they destroy the ruby, or perform some flashy magic (dust devil, flame blade, meld into stone, or even using grapes of invisibility), and Ka'tho is using her all around vision, she spots Durwadala behind them, casting a know alignment spell. As soon as it is cast, she disappears. If Ka'tho is not using this power, the other PCs may roll, on a 7 or better, they can spot her. Once they do, she comes forward, although not as a thri-kreen.

The other option, if they have been told she is watching, is to begin to state their problem. An impassioned plea by any of them for their lost clutchmate gets a response from Durwadala. Likewise, a plea for their mentor, the wise Klik'chaka'da, can get a response.

As you stand, wondering if Durwadala will show herself or not, a large dragonfly wings in from the stream. It flutters around Lakta'cho's head. She is ready to wave it away, those things are poisonous, when she notices that it is carrying a small pebble. No, it's a tiny gem. The bug drops the gem into Lakta'cho's claw, and begins to speak, in thri-kreen. "This gem contains the image of Klik's identity (psionic imprint). You must contact him via your mind (telepathically). Since you do not possess those means, you must develop them. Near the north end of the oasis are a patch of spider cacti. Growing among them are some flowers. If a black one is consumed by one practiced in the Way, she will develop new powers. If worthy, she can contact your mentor. You must prove your worth by leaving the spider cacti alone, taking only the flower you need. Whether your mentor will accede to your request, no true bug knows." The dragonfly then flits off into the trees.

The dragonfly is Durwadala. She is not going to show her true form, not even to other thri-kreen. Combat statistics are not necessary, if anyone attempts to capture or harm her, she simply disappears, instantly. As a dragonfly her AC is only 5, but she has 90 hit points. If she is hit, she changes into an air drake, a huge beast capable of defeating the PCs rather easily. If it comes to this, ask the PCs if they are going to apologize to the druid, or if they intend to all join Ka'cha in death. If they persist in attacking, have the drake make one attack sequence, ask the offending PC how many hit points he had left, and tell him that he now has one hit point. Is he going to continue?

The gem does indeed have Klik's psionic imprint on it, if Ka'tho touches it she can feel it. She can't do anything about it, at her current

level of power. The flowers sound like esperweed, which Ka'tho has heard of. This is a rare plant that boosts psionic powers when eaten. She has never heard of them giving a psionist a new discipline, but she has never heard of black esperweed before either.

Other methods that might work to get her attention include; doing something to make the oasis a stronger place, caring for plants, cleaning silt out of the pools, any type of nature work.

No matter what the PCs do, Durwadala does not come out in her natural form to talk. In fact, outside of delivering her message, she does not talk to the PCs at all. She doesn't really like people. Klik was different, she could tolerate him, but she didn't actually like him.

Note: Now that the PCs have water, any who lost constitution from lack of water can recover it. This means that they would recover 1d8 points of lost constitution, but not any hit points lost. Constitution points lost due to fatigue are not recovered. In effect, Hakka and Ka'tho are going to lose 10 hit points each from fatigue, T-k, Drasna, and K'ari are going to lose 2 or 3 points per level. If they also had con loss due to water, they could be down even more. Magical healing can restore these hit points immediately, you might want to mention this. Also, the party spends an hour making it through the oasis, drinking and resting and communicating with Durwadala. Drasna regenerates 6 hit points in this time, and T-k gets 1 - if they regained constitution points lost due to lack of water.

When the PCs head for the esperweed, proceed to encounter six.

ENCOUNTER SIX: Esperweed and megapedes.

You followed the directions of the dragonfly, and indeed, there is a large semi-circular patch of spider cactus, stretching almost a hundred feet across. The other end of the circle is taken up by pool of water cutting across the semi-circle. Different colored flowers grow at the base of the cacti, on the inside of the ring. The flowers range in color from red to blue to green to black. There are only a few of the black ones, the closest one is almost 30 feet away. The path to it is clear, but it does pass by almost a dozen of the deadly cacti. This type of plant is well known to you all. It shoots out groups of eight needles that paralyze its victims, then draws them in to feed on them. If the needles are burned off, the plant can be tapped for water. Unfortunately, you are

not allowed to burn the needles off. You do know that the needles can only be fired about 15', but none of the flowers grow that far from the cacti.

The ring of cacti are about 20' across, and 7' to 8' tall. Any of the thri-kreen can easily leap across. Drasna and T-k can wade through the water, but it gets deep. Drasna must make a dexterity check or fall and begin drowning. T-k can easily pull her out (dex check), but Drasna takes 1d8 points of damage from inhaled water. (She's never been swimming before.) T-k only falls if she rolls a natural 20, and Drasna is strong enough to steady her and help her to her feet. She takes the same damage, if this occurs. This damage is not permanent, they recover after ten minutes.

If the party ignores the druid's warning and begins to burn needles off of the cacti, probably by throwing torches, the flower they are trying for wilts and dies, drying up and blowing away before they can get near it. A passing insect tells them "one more chance only, no more", and wings off.

SPIDER CACTUS: NA (55), AC 7, Mv 0, AL N, HD 3, HP 20, #Att 8, THAC0 17, Damage 1+special, SA needles cause paralysis.

Spider cacti attack when a victim gets within 15', shooting out eight needles at its prey. Needles have strong strands attached to them, these are used to pull the prey into their body, where the feeding needles begin to suck liquids from a victim's body. Any hit causes one point of damage, and also requires a save vs. paralysis. The poison is rather weak, saving throws are at +2. If the victim fails the save, paralysis occurs in 2d4 rounds. The strands pull with a strength of 17, and only those with greater strength have a chance to pull free. It requires an Open Doors roll to pull out a needle, or a Bend Bars roll to break a strand. The strands can also be cut, they have an AC of 5, and take 5 points of damage. Blunt weapons do no damage to a strand. Pulling out the barbed needles causes an additional 1d4 points of damage to the victim. If someone is pulled into the cactus, he takes 2d4 + AC points of damage each round. The paralysis can be removed by a Remove Paralysis, or either a Slow Poison or a Neutralize Poison. The Klik's Ointment carried by several of the PCs also has the effect of neutralizing the paralysis poison. The paralysis lasts an hour, the PCs do know that, if anyone asks, and also how to neutralize it.

ESPERWEED: (NA 3), AC 10, Mv 0, HD 1/4, HP 1 ea, Sz S (3'). The esperweed has no attacks, and can be plucked merely by making a hit roll.

When the PCs reach the inside of the ring, they can see that there are three black flowers in plain sight. Two are at the base of a patch of four cacti, and one is about 5' away from a patch of three. Let the PCs decide what to do, they may come up with inventive ways around the problem. Otherwise, someone may just dash in, grab the flower, and try to dash back out. Such a person is subject to 24 attacks. To save all the dice rolling, you may just inflict the number of hits based on average dice rolls.

Drasna: AC 6: to hit roll of 11, 12 needles hit.

T-k: AC 9: to hit roll of 8, 15 needles hit.

Lakta'cho: AC 1: to hit roll of 16: 6 needles hit

Hakka: AC 3: to hit roll of 14, 8 needles hit.

K-K-K-ari'cho: AC -1: to hit roll of 18, 3 needles hit.

Ka'tho: AC 4: to hit roll of 13, 9 needles hit.

If more than one PC rushes in, split up the attacks accordingly, but a cactus does not fire at multiple targets. Thus, if two PCs rush in, one takes 16 of the attacks, the other takes 8. The cacti prefer to attack larger creatures, so either T-k or Lakta'cho get the most needles, roll randomly if other PCs make the attempt.

Each needle inflicts only 1 point of damage, but the PC cannot move until all of the needles are pulled out, or the strands are severed. Probably the most successful method would be to have two or three of the thri-kreen rush in and grab the flowers, and then have Drasna and T-k pull them out. It requires a successful open doors roll to pull a PC free, with a minus one to the chance for every extra strand. (Thus, T-k with a chance of 17 or less, would need a 9 or less to pull Ka'tho free of 9 needles.) If more than one PC is pulling, add one to the chance for each PC helping, counting the stuck PC as well. Chatkchas and kyorkchas are also excellent for cutting strands. If the PCs state that they have them ready, they can get attacks on the round the flower-gatherer is first hit. Remember that only someone with a strength of 17 or better even has a chance to pull free, although those with lesser strength can assist the stronger PCs, and grant them the bonus to the chance.

If someone is trying to pull a snared PC free, but doesn't succeed in the first round, they are subject to 24 attacks as well. Spider Cactus do not keep firing at a victim they have ensnared, and since all of the PCs are hit by at least three needles, they are all hit by all three plants. Remember that anyone pulled free in this manner takes an extra 1d4 damage per needle.

The PCs have options to raise their success chances. Most of these work, but in limited fashion.

Invisibility: No effect, the plant does not have sight, rather sensing the moisture in a being's body.

Speed: If someone is willing to give up a whole year of life, they should be rewarded. They still get hit, but they make it to 14' away from the plant. This allows other PCs to help pull them out, or chop at strands with swords, without being hit themselves.

Cherries of Stone Giant Strength, or the Psionic devotion Share Strength have obvious effects, increasing the PCs chances to break free. The **Strength of the Land devotion** grants no increase in the chances to break free, but it does absorb the first 25 points of damage. It does not help resist the paralysis, however.

Body Equilibrium: No beneficial effect, the PC is pulled into the plant in only one round, if someone doesn't grab her.

Water: The simple way out. If eight water bottles or wineskins are tossed in, one at a time, the plants fire at them. This depletes all of the needles, the PCs can safely walk in and pluck the flower. This also ruins eight waterskins or containers, as the cacti impale them and rip them apart. The plants sense moisture, so clever PCs can avoid any danger.

If someone specifically asks how the plants work, both rangers, the savage, and the wilderness warrior can all make wisdom rolls, success should be rewarded based on the roll.

Succeeding by one or two gets a basic description; the plant fires its needles and draws the victim in to feed.

Succeeding by four or more means that the PC knows that only a strong being (17 or better) gets a chance to break free. The plant exists on the moisture in its victims.

Succeeding by ten or more means that the PC knows that it senses moisture, that it never has more than eight sets of needles, and that it will fire at anything with substantial moisture (at least a quart) that is brought within 15'. If the PCs have kept the useless waterskins that they made at the oasis, they are not useful, even here.

Just as the PCs finish handling the cacti, they are attacked from behind by the very type of beast that slew Ka'cha, megapedes. Unless someone is specifically keeping watch, the first sign that something is coming is the sound of something splashing in the pool. When the PCs look, the megapedes is coming out of the pool, and will be closed before they can react. If someone is keeping watch, they get a normal surprise roll to notice the creatures as they

come out of the trees and enter the pool. If this happens, they may react, although the PCs still involved in freeing a trapped PC cannot react until next round. Those not involved in freeing a PC, and not actively watching the PCs backs, gets a normal surprise roll to hear the megapedes.

Megapede: NA (2), AC 3, Mv 12, HD 10, HP 60, 79, THAC0 11, # Att 5 or 1, Damage 1d6x5, or 5d6, SA poison, relevant psionic talents: Disintegrate, death field, energy containment, biofeedback, psionic blast, ego whip, chameleon power, contact. Sz 100, 115 feet long. A summary of the psionic powers is included, this is the beasts' most dangerous form of attack. Remember that the beasts must make a roll of 15 or less to succeed at any psionic power. They have 150 PSPs each. If they do not physically attack, they can use two psionic powers per round. Their bite cause 5-30 points of damage, and the victim must save vs. poison. Failure means another 20 points of damage are taken, success means only 1-3 points of damage.

IMPORTANT NOTE: Psionic attacks have no initiative modifier, but can be disrupted just as spell casting can. Thus, if the PCs are damaged first in the round, they may use no psionic attacks, the same applies to the megapedes. If this happens, both sides have the option of switching to physical attacks instead. Also, psionic attacks are fast, physical attacks, are not (particularly by the megapedes). If the megapedes are using psionics, the PCs must win initiative on the dice, dexterity bonuses will not help. Ka'tho's Combat Mind devotion does grant a -1, and dex bonuses do count against physical attacks. In fact, with the megapedes' modifiers (+9) due to size, the PCs should almost always go first against physical attacks.

Disintegrate: Cost 40. Target must save vs. death magic, or lose 8 cubic feet from the center of their body. In other words, they die. Because of the cost, the megapedes only use this once, when they are near death.

Death Field: Cost 40. All in a 20 yd radius must save vs. death magic or lose the hit points decided on by the creature. The megapedes take 10 points at a shot, and are affected by each other's fields. The user takes the same amount of damage. Again, the megapedes only use this power once each, at the beginning of the battle.

Energy Containment: Cost 10. Allows the beasts to double the number rolled for a saving throw vs. an energy attack, like fire, cold, or lightning.

Biofeedback: Cost 6 +3/round, increases AC by 1, and lowers damage per attack by 2 (minimum of zero).

Contact: Cost 5 +1/round, this is required before either of the psionic attacks below can be used. If successful, the victim can be attacked the next round. Contact automatically fails against Ka'tho's Thought Shield, which is always on. It requires three successful attacks by one of the two powers below to establish contact against a shielded mind. The beasts probably won't be alive that long, and they don't expect the PCs to be.

Ego Whip: Cost 4, victim is dazed for 1d4 rounds, during which all of his die rolls (psionic powers, melee attacks, saving throws, missile attacks, ability checks, etc.) are penalized five points (or 25%), and no spells above 3rd level may be cast.

Psionic Blast: Cost 10: victim must save vs. death magic or lose 80% of his remaining hit points, but only in his mind. He loses consciousness when the remaining 20% of his hit points are lost, but after one hour, the effect wears off.

The megapedes have a simple strategy that has worked before. As they close, they both attempt biofeedback, and try to establish contact with two of the PCs. On the second round, they psionic blast a PC each, and use their death field powers. They expect this to kill all of the PCs, it certainly hurts the ones who have been blasted. All PCs must make two saves vs. death magic, or take 10 points for each save failed. The megapedes take 10 points each, and must save (8), or take another 10.

Depending on how well the PCs have done, you may want to give them a small break. Have one of the megapedes attempt to contact Ka'tho, this fails, and gives them a little extra edge.

After the initial attack fails to incapacitate the entire party, the megapedes use their secondary strategy. They alternately bite, and use psionics. On the second round, the smaller one tries to establish contact with two of the PCs, while the larger bites someone. The following round the smaller uses both ego whip and psionic blast, while the larger bites again. Then they reverse the attacks. If one is slain, the remaining one uses disintegrate on the slayer, and death field for another 10 points on everyone else (if it has enough PSPs left). If 10 points would kill it, it uses all but one of its hit points. If this fails, it attempts to flee.

Remember the hovering at death's door rule is always used in Dark Sun adventures. Any PC who was conscious before a death field is not

entirely dead from 10 points of damage. They can be saved by anyone with healing proficiency, or magic healing (Klik's ointment). They recover consciousness in one turn.

Megapedes have only animal intelligence, they tend to attack those who hurt them first. If one is hit by a number of PCs, he'll attempt to hit as many different PCs as possible with his 5 leg attacks.

The combined death fields kill almost all of the spider cacti in the area. Neither the PCs nor the megapedes are subject to attacks from the remaining 20 or so cacti that now form two separate patches. The cacti look the same, but don't attack. The druid, at least, senses that the cacti are now dead. The megapedes aren't sure of this, they're not going to blunder into spider cactus, it might hurt. It is safe to hide in the cactus, where the PCs could safely launch missiles. The megapedes respond by disintegrating the cactus the PC is hiding behind, the cactus has no saving throw vs. this attack.

If the PCs are putting up a good fight, but are failing due to poor rolls, you have an option to help them. Durwadala is not pleased that the megapedes have destroyed most of a patch of spider cacti. She will aid the PCs with one spell, where they need it most. Since she is a 12th level druid, she has access to 6th level spells. A paralyzed PC may suddenly find that they can move again (remove paralysis), someone who is at one hit point may find themselves fully healthy (heal), someone who is about to expire (at -9) may stabilize at 1 hit point (cure light wounds.)

When the megapedes are slain, Ka'tho can eat the esperweed, and develop telepathy. If Ka'tho has been slain in the battle, any of the PCs can use the esperweed.

If Ka'tho eats it, she can use the stone to contact Klik. He asks about the situation, and why Ka'tho is contacting him. He is also proud of her for developing telepathy. As soon as he hears of Ka'cha's death, he replies that he will be there soon, and breaks contact. If any other PC tries it, about all they can do is broadcast a 'Klik, help' signal, and receive an 'I'm coming' reply. In about ten minutes, Klik leaps out of an existing spider cactus, narrowly being missed by the shower of needles that follow him. He has arrived via his transport via plants spell. The PCs must now convince him to resurrect Ka'cha.

ENCOUNTER 7: Life or Death?

Finally, your mentor stands before you. Klik'chaka'da is a fine figure of a Tohr-Kreen, a true mantis noble. Standing 10' at the shoulder, his radiant sandy-yellow carapace gleams in the sunlight. He turns those deep purple eyes on you and says "Clutchmates. My goodness, it's good to see you. Tell me of Ka'cha, what has happened?"

Let the PCs tell the story of the death of Ka'cha. When they get done, Klik looks sad (his eyes turn lighter - almost blue), and says "It is a sad thing, but what am I to do?" When told that they want Ka'cha to be resurrected, he looks upset. (His mandibles click and his eyes get darker.) 'This is a powerful thing you ask for. I shall have to summon the spirits of the lands themselves, to bring back his life. While I am saddened by Ka'cha's death, what powerful reason do I have that he must live in preference to any other that has died? Think children, for I hope you have such a reason.'

It is up to the PCs here. There are several solutions that get almost immediate success.

Without Ka'cha, he and Ka'tho cannot mate, and there will be no new clutch of larvae, raised in the Kiklektet way. This is a valid argument. Thri-kreen mate for life, and even though Ka'tho has not formally mated with Ka'cha, she could take no other mate. Lakta'cho is to old to mate. If this is used, Klik is swayed. If time permits, he may resist for a while, but this is a potent argument.

The pack cannot survive without Ka'cha as the leader. Actually, since he was training both Lakta'cho and Ka'tho, this is a valid argument. Both need tutoring to advance in levels, and Ka'cha handled both jobs. Since Hakka will eventually have to return to his guarded lands, the party would have no spellcaster higher than 5th level, not a good survival trait for the pack. If this argument is used, Klik wavers. He asks about the sacrifices the party made to get here, pointing out that the party did quite well without Ka'cha. If someone replies that Ka'cha was responsible, they could only do it for someone like him, he concedes the point.

Ka'cha's death was undignified, and he deserved better. Klik concedes this, but points out that many deaths are unnecessary, and all beings feel that their passing is undeserved. Not a valid point.

Ka'cha's death was a sacrifice, saving the pack. He agrees, but also points out that this is

the best way for a thri-kreen to go out, defending the clutch. He mentions that sometimes a balance must be maintained, and asks if any PC would sacrifice their lives, if that is what it took to bring Ka'cha back. The response had better be 100%, and enthusiastic. If so, Klik looks impressed, and says that perhaps he would too. Not really a valid point, but the offer of self-sacrifice counts.

Let the PCs present all of their arguments, and all six must speak. Klik wants to hear from the entire pack, for this is an important decision. They should really come up with at least two valid points, either those given above, or others just as good.

Before he casts the spell, he speaks to each of the PCs.

To Lakta'cho: "You are the perfect advisor, and your wisdom is necessary to the pack. Help Ka'cha, for the pack will face many trials."

To Drasna: "Daughter of long life, who spends part of it dead, fear not the future. Your place is with your pack, and the pack to come."

To T-k: "Young tower with the heart of a thri-kreen, you have succeeded in your desires. You are as much a clutchmate as any mantis could ever hope to be."

To K-ari: "Warrior, now that you have defended the pack in a challenge, you can truly feel a clutchmate. I see for you a happy life, and a warrior's death."

To Ka'tho: "Youngling, dearer than my own larvae, I see many young, and a fine strong pack. Let sorrow behind, for it will always be bearable as long as Ka'cha is at your side.

This should get the PCs to ask what's going on, is Klik going to die in the attempt? Remind them that Klik is a very old bug, and a Resurrection spell ages the caster 5 years. To the PCs, Klik just replies that he has lived a long time, as long as the pack survives it's all that matters. This is the last opportunity for the PCs to get in a lick, someone could offer to take Klik's place, or perhaps even change their mind entirely. This offer is not, and cannot be accepted. Klik deeply appreciates it, and tells the offerer; "a true clutchmate. Thank you, my friend, but no. Your place is with the pack."

With a bit of worry in your hearts, you watch as Klik begins the spell. For minutes, he chants and gestures, and you can feel the magic building in the air. You hear his voice get fainter and fainter, as he calls for Ka'cha to rejoin the

world. Then his voice gets stronger again, and finally he stops and looks satisfied. You are overjoyed to see your pack leader stand up and chirp at you "Well, mates, that was strange. It seems that I owe you much. Klik, what's happened to you?"

You look over and see in horror that Klik has changed. He has grown old. Thri-kreen show no signs of aging until just a few days before they pass away. Klik looks at Ka'cha and smiles (mandibles stop and eyes turn very light blue), "It is all right my friend, it was my time, but not yet yours. Remember me and raise your larvae in the Kiklektet way."

Klik then takes out a small amulet, and dashes it to the ground in front of him. From it rises a small blue fire, that quickly grows to encompass him. Before your eyes he begins to grow hazy, almost misty. His form becomes more and more insubstantial, until finally the fire dies, and nothing remains but a feeling of peace from Klik'chaka'da.

Your leader looks at you with respect and says "It looks like we have a new quest, but this one could take years. The Kiklektet sect will flourish, we, at least I, owe it to Klik. Come, let's go home."

EPILOGUE

Well, as you know, the next spring the clutch found this place. It was a nasty place then, full of undead spirits and the like. With Ka'cha in the lead again, the spirits were quickly banished. There was one very powerful spirit, it even resisted Ka'cha. He called it a vampir. That was K-K-K-ari'cho's finest hour. He took a lightning bolt meant for Ka'cha, and a fireball meant for Lakta'cho. Even after all of that, he still managed to slay the foul creature, driving his wooden stiletto into its heart. Although he perished in the battle, he died a true clutchmate.

T-k also died defending the pack, a roc had grasped two young children, when T-k leaped upon it, causing it to release the children. T-k eventually managed to slay the roc, but by then it was several thousand feet in the air.

Hakka eventually returned to his guarded lands, and they say he talked more to elementals than to mantis-men. There are rumors he still lives in the Yellow Hills, somewhere, but no one has seen him in generations.

Ka'cha and Ka'tho founded our pack, and many of you are descended from them. I see the eyes of Ka'cha in many of you, as I look around. Always remember what you owe to the clutchmates of Ka'cha, for without them most of you would not exist.

Well that's the story of the great run for Ka'cha, and the lesson is, you do anything

necessary for a clutchmate. No go out and run, the temperature is only 110, it's a beautiful day outside.

The children were reluctant to leave, but they left none the less. While she told the best stories, grandma Drasna could still get real mad if she wanted. And she was so incredibly old! People said that she even knew Ka'cha, but that must just be a story. Why Ka'cha died over 40 years ago, and he was a very old bug. Nobody lives that long. The children ran out from the village, to run in the desert. They looked the same as before, but within each of them burned a desire to be as good a clutchmate as Ka'cha's friends. That's what being a clutchmate is all about!

Drasna watched them go with a good feeling in her heart. It had not been easy, all of the years since her clutchmates passed on. Looking at the hundreds of busy thri-kreen, she had to feel that it had been worth it.

Here ends "Clutchmates"